821 caused the tender plant to sprout; therefore, cereal grains just
[243] beginning to sprout are called "charäqwa". Full moon is a good time
[484] to travel, avoiding the heat of the day especially in the hot lowlands where travel in daytime is almost impossible; also it is safer since approaching or ambushing bandits can be more readily seen than earlier or later in the lunar cycle.

Dawn is personified, regarded as a young day being suckled ("täbba") by the warm and expansive sun, after chill of the night on the plateau.

787 However, the working out of astrological systems is left to the däbtära, who collects his knowledge from "secret" books (in Geez), more often actually from apprenticeship and extracurricular activities while in church school, and uses it in writing especially powerful and expensive amulets.

821 The various kinds of rain are almost as important to the Amhara as snows to the Eskimo and sands to the desert Arab. For the Amhara with his primitive plowing, has to wait until the right kind of light rain loosens the sunbaked soil; and his simple hut is little protection from the heavy rains. He therefore studies clouds and wind direction in relation to topography. The fine and penetrating rain ("zeg yalä zenab") permits the use of the common scratch-plow, and seeding. The heavy rainy season brings downpours, and is also accompanied by strong gusts of wind ("wächafo") and tornadoes. When the thunderstorm ends and a rainbow appears, it seems as if the earth had been reprieved, so that the rainbow is called "maryam mägämät" (lit. the jealousy of Mary; i.e. her intercession, in the Geez language). However, when a rainbow occurs while it is still raining, the interpretation is more animistic, for it is regarded as an unnatural event, heralding the moment at which wild

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
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231 a Christian, because the cows that they keep belong to
563 Christian gentlemen of the country of the Barnagais. These Moors have nothing else for their labour than the milk and butter which they get from the cows, and with this they maintain themselves and their wives and children. On some occasions it happened to us to sleep near these Arabs, they accosted us to ask if we wished to buy cows, and for the price allowed us to choose them. They say that these
● [484] Moors, and headmen who go with them, are all robbers under the favour of the lords to whom the cows belong, and so only large caravans travel. The revenues of this
792 monastery are very large; those which I saw and heard of
631 are, chiefly, this mountain in which the monastery is situated,
361 of an extent of ten leagues, in which they sow much millet,
[243] barley, rye, and all these pay dues to the monastery, and they are also paid on the herds. On the skirts of this mountain there are many large villages, and most of them belong to the monastery, and at a distance of one or two days' journey an infinite number of places belonging to the monastery, and are called *Gultus* of the monastery, which means *coutos* or *celeiros*,[1] according to our Portugal. Don Rodrigro the ambassador and I were going on the road to the Court, a good five days' journey from this monastery, and arriving at a town which is named *Caina* we kept Saturday and Sunday in a small village which might contain twenty people, and they told us they belonged to the monastery of Bisan. Besides that town there were a hundred villages all belonging to the monastery, and that in which we halted was one of them. We were also shown
651 many of the others, and they told us that every three years
631 they paid a horse to the monastery, and that each village
792 did this, which makes thirty-three horses every year. And in order to be certain of this I went to ask it of the *Alicaxi* of the monastery, which means the auditor or major-domo,

[1] *Couto*, an asylum, an enclosure; *celeiro*, a granary.

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
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because he receives, and does justice: he told me that it was 651
true that they paid the said horses. I asked why the 631
monastery wanted so many horses, since they did not ride 792
on them. He told me that they were obliged to pay horses, but that they did not give him horses, but paid fifty cows for each horse, and that this due of horses was so because these were villages of the King which paid him this due, and as he had endowed the monastery with these villages, between the monastery and the villagers this due of horses had been transmuted into cows. And over and above these dues of cows they also pay dues on fruits. Besides, at fifteen days' journey from the monastery, in the kingdom of Tigre mahom, there is a very large town belonging to the monastery named Aadete, which may be a large dukedom. This pays every year sixty horses, and an infinite number of dues and customs. In this district there are always more than a thousand friars of the monastery, because there are many churches in it, and the monastery is much favoured there. Of these friars some are very good, honourable, and devout, and others are not such. Besides these dues of horses paid to this monastery and to others, there are many villages belonging to the King which pay dues of the said horses, because this is always his due, and there are villages neighbouring to Egypt in which are large and good horses, and others near Arabia in which they are very good, but not so much so as those of Egypt.

CAP. XVI.—*How the friars impeded our departure, and of what happened to us on the road.*

Returning therefore to our journey; whilst we were still 484
at the monastery of St. Michael there arrived the man sent by the Barnagais to take us away, and with him two of our Portuguese, on the fourth day of the month of June; and he

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

484 brought a few oxen and men to carry our baggage. The said man who had thus come went off at once to the mountains to fetch more oxen and people, and he came back with them. Whilst our baggage was out in the road for our departure, and the men and oxen ready, the friars came and talked so much to the people without their understanding us that they disarranged our departure, so that we again took in our baggage, and the ambassador again sent another time to the Barnagais, and Joan Escolar the clerk went thither with the man of the Barnagais, and they remained there six days. They came with orders and equipment for our departure, that is to say, that they were to conduct us and our goods, and to give us as many oxen and mules as we had need of. Even then the friars were set on impeding us greatly, as though they wished us evil. We left this monastery of St. Michael on the 15th day of June, and because there was detention in loading the baggage, on account of the oxen only coming in a few at a time, and there not being mules enough for all of us, and some having to go on foot, and also because there were few people to carry the baggage which could not go on the oxen where the country was precipitous, the bombards and four barrels of powder remained behind. Not very far from the monastery, half a league at most, the ambassador came up, and those that had remained with him, and we found all the baggage unloaded. Not being able to understand the cause for their having done it, we made them load it again; and not having yet started it all, a rumour arose amongst the negroes who were carrying our baggage, and they said that there were robbers there who were waiting for us in the road. Nevertheless we did not on that account desist from making the baggage go on in front through the bushes, because the road was narrow. The ambassador and all those that were with him determined to die upon the King's goods. The negroes were much amazed at the courage of

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
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ten or twelve men, who did not fear passing such steep 484
mountains, where it was said that there were multitudes of
robbers. Thus we went away, divided, with the oxen and
negroes, with their burdens in front of us, going forward on
our course. We travelled through very wild mountains, 133
over ascents and descents, and very bad stony road. Most [491]
of the woods of these mountains are very large wild olive [131]
trees, from which good olive trees could be made. Issuing
from these mountain ranges we entered into dry channels,
which in winter time are great rivers, that is to say, as long
as the showers last. As soon as the shower is finished the
river is dry. These channels have on each side of them
very high mountains, as rugged as those we had left behind.
In these river beds there are large clumps of unknown
trees, amongst which, near the rivers, there are a few wild [131]
palm trees. We slept this night in a river bed with little
water in it.

CAP. XVII.—*How we passed a great mountain in which there were many apes, on a Saturday, and on the following Sunday we said mass in a village called Zalote.*

On the following day we again crossed another very high
and rugged mountain ridge, over which we could not make
our way, either on the mules or on foot. In this mountain 136
there are many animals of different species, and an infinite
quantity of apes in herds: and they are not generally spread
over the mountain, but only where there are clefts and holes
in the rock; they are not found in quantities less than two
or three hundred, and beyond that number. If there is
any flat ground above these precipices, that is their
promenade, and no stone remains that they do not turn,
and they scrape the earth so that it looks as though it were
tilled. They are very large, the size of sheep, and from the
middle upwards hairy like lions.

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
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night. And if it is distant they say, you will arrive in a *sambete*, that is a week, and so they define it according to the distances. When I said that from Barua to Barra there were from three and a half up to four leagues, that was according to our opinion, and it would not be more. We afterwards travelled there many times, and we started from one town and dined at the other, and did our business and returned to the town we had started from by daylight. The people of the country reckon this as a day's journey, because they travel very slowly. Between these two towns there is very remarkable country, tilled fields of wheat, barley, millet, pulse, lentils, and all other sorts of vegetables which the country possesses unknown to us. From the road from one place to the other more than fifty towns are to be seen: I say large towns and very good ones, all on heights. In these plains and fields there are herds of wild cattle, forty or fifty in a herd. It is a chase that is very pleasant for the Portuguese, but the country people are able to do them little hurt, although they receive from them much injury to their crops.

CAP. XX.—*Of the town of Barua, and of the women and their traffic, and of the marriages which are made outside of the churches.*

This town of Barua in which we were staying, and where later we passed more time, may have three hundred hearths and more, a great part of them belonging to women, because this is like a court in many respects. One is that people of the Prester's court never go from here, and as many as come are not without wives. The other is because this is the residence and seat of the Barnagais, and there are continually in his house three hundred mounted men and upwards, and as many more who come every day for

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
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In this country there are in some parts very flat lands, and in others mountainous; and altogether they are fruitful lands. There are no snowy ranges, but withal severe frosts, especially in the flat lands. In all the lands there is great breeding of cattle. 133 [231]

He says that he did not see the river Nile, and he reached to two days' journey from it, and the days' journey which they went were small ones, namely, four or five leagues, a little more or less. But some of those in his company reached its source, and they say that it rises in the Kingdom of Gojame, and its source is in great lakes, and where it rises there are islands, and thence it commences its course and goes to Egypt.

The time when the Nile rises in Egypt is (as they say) from the 15th day of September and later, and in all October; and the reason of this is, because the winter of Ethiopia begins from the middle of June to the middle of September, and on account of the great rains which take place in it without this winter ever changing, the Nile overflows in Egypt at that time.

It is the general custom of Prester John and all the people for no man on horseback to pass a church, but before they reach it they dismount, and so pass it, and lead their beasts by the bridles, and after passing they mount. 492 576

When Prester John and all his people travel, the altar and the altar stone on which mass is said, all goes on the shoulders of the priests as on a litter, and there go eight priests with each altar by turns, that is, four and four: and a priest goes in front of them with a thurible, and further in front a zagonay ringing a bell, and all the people go away from the road, and those that are on horses dismount, and show reverence to the altar stone or altar. 484

There is no grape wine there, more than in two houses, where it is made publicly, namely, in the house of Prester John and the house of the Patriarch Abima Marcos; and if 273

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

impressions conveyed by much of the literature on Ethiopia, is not a normal ecological unit in Amhara society.

Each homestead gives the appearance of self-sufficiency and autonomy, but it is bound to a wider social context in a number of ways. While satisfying most of its consumption needs by its own efforts, every household depends on the market for certain items. The highland peasants must go to market for their chili, onions, peppers, hops, and cotton; while lowland peasants must barter for barley and sheep there. Salt and foreign fabrics must be imported from afar, and iron and clay products must be bought from specialists who bring their wares. Limited needs for currency—chiefly for rifles and, since 1942, taxes—are also met at the market.

The markets normally are held once a week. Every homestead is within walking distance of at least one market; though often the trip may take several hours, at times the greater part of a day. Markets in the same region are often scheduled on different days, so that, for example, the family which misses the one five hours to the north on Saturday can catch another four hours to the south on Tuesday. The virtual absence of roads throughout the countryside makes travel to market slow and tedious, but wealthier peasants nonetheless manage to transport quantities of grain and livestock to the provincial capitals for better prices and a wider selection of consumers' goods.

The household is linked to a wider world politically as well as economically. By providing tithes, revenues, military service, and corvée labor, the peasant has traditionally been obliged to support an extensive political hierarchy. In return for this he has received an organization for defending the country against enemies, and a structure of legitimate authority sufficient to maintain order and settle disputes.

The peasant's relations with this political hierarchy have been mediated by the office of ***chĭqā shum***, a district headman. This office is circulated, usually annually, among a small number of men whose eligibility is based on their ownership of certain pieces of land. As the land passes from father to son, so does the eligibility for being ***chĭqā shum***.

Traditionally the ***chĭqā shum*** was a role of considerable importance. It carried the duties of tax collection, adjudication, promulgation of official decrees, supervision of occasional work projects, levying of men for military service, and officiating at civil marriages and divorces. Through his work the ***chĭqā shum*** received a variety of fees and bribes. In cases of flagrant misbehavior the local people were able to dismiss him from office. The reorganization of provincial administration since 1942 has deprived the ***chĭqā shum*** of many of his former powers, but the office still exists and plays a modest role in peasant life.

The district over which a ***chĭqā shum*** has authority is the closest thing to a village unit among the Amhara. It is usually coterminous with the area sur-

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

heaven, *samāy*, the abode of supernatural beings and the souls of the dead. The earth is seen as flat, though some believe its shape to be square, others think it is round like a disc, and still others imagine it to extend without limit. That the terrain of Ethiopia is so obviously not flat is explained by reference to the great flood, after which the parts which dried quickly became highlands (*dēgā*), the parts slow to dry becoming lowlands (*qolā*). The peasant explains the greater heat of the lowlands by saying that they receive less wind than the highlands.

Beneath the earth's surface is an obscure area called *maq*, a depth to which the bodies of evildoers drop after burial. There is also a large subterranean ocean, *weqniyānos*, into which all the rivers and lakes on earth descend. The earth itself is held up, according to some, by a Y-shaped piece of wood; according to others, by two serpents; still another view is that no support is needed other than the will of God, as the saying indicates:

> Ay, My God! Lord who stretched forth the heavens without a pillar, and the earth without tent-pegs.

The rotation of the sun *above* the earth causes the alternation of night and day. The imagery of this rotation is that of someone going home at night and coming out in the morning. Attitudes toward the sun are quite ambivalent. The sun is appreciated for dispersing the morning chill and for causing seed to germinate, but it is feared as a source of sickness and death.*

The moon is highly regarded, which is probably a vestige of pre-Christian moon worship. At the Ethiopian latitude the moon is functional, for its bright illumination facilitates night travel, especially desirable in the hotter regions. Beyond this, the moon is considered a powerful agent. It is chief of the sky, commander of an army of stars and it is the force which causes crops to grow after the sun has brought forth seedlings.

In the heavenly realm there are two regions located on either side of God's dwelling-place. To the right is an area where good souls repair for an eternity of ease after being judged shortly after the death of their bodies. Known both as the "kingdom of heaven" and "paradise"—terms which refer to quite different spheres in the Orthodox cosmology but are fused in the vulgar mind—it is regarded as a home where food and clothes are plentiful and freely distributed. To the left is the place where wicked souls are taken by the devil to be scorched eternally in the fire of Gehenna, also called *Si'ol* (again a fusion of concepts which are distinct for the learned). This treatment of the damned is made worse by alternate dippings in icy water, though some believe that the wicked souls get a respite from their tortures on weekends.

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* The TAT's revealed a great dread of the sun; nearly every respondent interpreted one or another of the cards in terms of the sun's dangerousness.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

*565 156 157 man, as we shall see in more detail below, includes the quality of leaving others alone.

[577] This strong sense of self is confirmed and symbolized by two conspicuous *565 156 411 Amhara customs: carrying staves and going on trips. A staff, like a pipe, affirms the ego in two ways. As a piece of personal property right at hand, it stimulates a sense of pride of ownership; as something external yet confronting the person, it makes the ego more conscious of its bounded reality. Such sensations are daily experiences for the Amhara peasant, who is rarely separated from the staff in one form or other. When he leaves his homestead he normally carries the hard *dulā*, a potential weapon of defense that likewise affirms his ego by bolstering self-confidence in a dangerous world. He braces the *dulā* against his back as he treks along, or holds it against the [481] front of his shoulder like a rifle. Older men walk using it as a cane. A special kind of staff made of softer wood (*zang*) is carried by pious and elderly [481] men. Participants in devotional services lean on still another type of staff (*maqudmiyā*) which is distributed in the church for that purpose.

*565 156 484 Traveling is another custom which affirms the ego, at least when one travels spontaneously and not in organized company. As the individual moves past various stimuli, his self-consciousness is heightened by the contrast between a persisting ego and a constantly changing environment. As a traveler par excellence—and a lone traveler, unless social rank requires the presence of retainers—the Amhara peasant frequently removes himself from familiar home settings and confronts an outside world. He loves to go on the road and will travel at the slightest provocation. For him a distance of two or three hours by foot is like the American's trip to the corner drugstore. Whether to visit relatives or pay respects after death, to go to market or to court, to get holy water at a distant church, or to look after land in a far away district, the Amhara peasant is on the move dozens of times each year, often for trips involving two or three days of travel.

*565 156 829 602 609 Because of the great emphasis on the self in Amhara experience and culture, one may for the moment say that the personal ego is the central object in the Amhara peasant's view of society. Exactly what might be meant by this statement and in what respects it needs qualification are questions that will be taken up in the concluding chapter. If it is so, certainly the next most prominent social object in his world is the circle of close ones, or *zamad*. *Zamad* refers in the first instance to consanguineal kin, and is distinguished from the category of those who are strangers, or *bā'ed*. This is perhaps the most important of all the sociological distinctions made by the Amhara: the former, *zamad*, are seen as entitled to the warmest hospitality, while toward *bā'ed* indifference and suspicion are appropriate responses.

*565 156 602 This does not mean that the kin group is a corporate entity whose interests and identity transcend that of the individual. On the contrary, the notion of

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
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MAP 3

EXTREME DISTANCES TRAVELLED TO PRINCIPAL WEEKLY MARKETS OF HIGHLAND BEGEMDER PROVINCE

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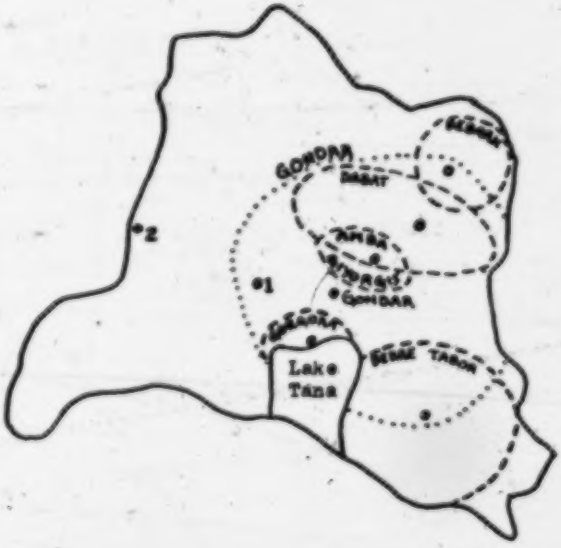

Distances from Gondar

Amba Giyorgis...	24 miles
Dabat.....	44 miles
Debark.....	61 miles
Debre Tabor.....	104 miles
Gorgora.....	40 miles
Chilga (1).....	45 miles
Metemma (2).....	140 miles

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632 centered in a town and extending outward to include those areas from which peasants come to buy and sell.
[132] The size of the town's sphere contracts and expands sea-
[484] sonally, reaching its nadir furing the rainy season, when overland travel becomes difficult owning to deep mud and raging torrents. Then, travelling is infrequent and confined to the market town closest to a peasant's home parish. Although market trips are more frequent during the remainder of the year, most terminate at the closest market. These relatively short trips are favored when grain is brought to the mills located on the periphery
[796] of most market sites. The spheres of the larger towns (Gondar, Debre Tabor, Dabat) reach maximum size on the market days which preceed the great celebrations of the Coptic Church---Meskal (which celebrates the discovery of the True Cross, and follows the end of the rains), Michaelmas (November), Timkat (feast of the Epiphany, and preceeding the Lenten fast), and Easter. Map 3 indicates the extreme limits for market spheres of the towns of the Begemder highlands.

[491] The highland market towns are strung along the province's only all-weather motor road.[14] Each offers a

[648] [14]This road, built during the Italian occupation (1936-1941), runs north to Asmara (capital of Eritrea) and (since the 1960's) south to Addis Ababa (the national capital). A dry season road links the highland towns to Metemma on the Sudan border.

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tection against ganels (but as a category of agents, rather than as named individuals), against the shifta bandit, and against the wild animals of the lowlands. The prophylactic abinet that he acquires, although short on asmat, perhaps lacking telsem, and with few magical features of manufacture, he works into kitabs. While the student's initial stimulus for collecting these abinet is his own immediate needs, he is nonetheless aware of the commercial value of such abinet, in the form of commercial services for lowland peasants.

Relatively few experienced debteras pay visits to the kola lands. The lowlands, considered unhealthful and dangerous by highlanders in general, are still less appealing to the mature debtera. He deprecates them for the absence of ecclesiastical establishments, and fears them for what he believes to be the shifta's predilection for robbing and murdering debteras.[27] In lieu of more expert services, and attracted by the moderate costs, the lowlander is often anxious to purchase kitabs from visiting students. The students, in anticipation, prepare a score or more of kitabs before traveling to the lowlands;

[27] Debteras attribute the shifta's murderousness to his fear of subsequent magical revenge by the debtera.

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
Begemder

a blank space is left on each kitab, to be filled in later with the client's name. In general, the student initially sells kitabs to the lowlands to assist him in gathering agricultural products. The kitabs are purchased with either crops or services, and only infrequently with money. The peasant's services include recommending the student's kitabs to his neighbors, safe storage of the goods which the student has collected, and lending draught animals to bring the student's sacks up to the highlands. Sometimes, enterprising students arrange their visits in order to obtain payment in cotton, a relatively valuable product which debtera students are unable to obtain otherwise.

The student's experience selling kitabs in the lowlands has a significant effect on the course of his subsequent abinet career. First, his abinet interests are redirected. His previous acquisitions were abinet which served an immediate personal interest, and whose commercial value was adventitious. These commercial successes, however small-scale, frequently stimulate the student to obtain abinet which have an exclusively commercial value. Interest in personally useful abinet by no means ends during this period, however; often it is accelerated by the student's changing attitudes to the practice of abinet. There is a tendency to now perceive his moral interests as less opposed to these works than he had pre-

as his radat. In practice, this debtera is usually the student's memher (ecclesiastical teacher), since the student cannot simultaneously serve two debteras, the memher and an abinet teacher, without offending the pride of both. Occasionally an enthusiastic collector of abinet may serve under a debtera in order to learn only abinet. Under these circumstances, both student and teacher maintain the pretext that the abinet collector is but another of the debtera's ecclesiastical scholars. In both situations, the abinet subject is learned only gradually, as the radat releases it, secret by secret, over a period of weeks or even months. The student, for his part, may be expected to provide confidential assistance in support of the debtera's abinet activities (sometimes involving kifat, offensive abinet), to act as his mentor's medhaniyt korac, or, less often, to provide substantial agricultural services, such as ploughing.

As a debtera student grows older and advances in his ecclesiastical studies, he finds it progressively easier to acquire new abinet studies. By then, he has travelled extensively over the network of monasteries and famous churches which are scattered over the northern plateau. In the course of these travels, he has made the acquaintance of many abinet-practicing debteras, and consequently a great variety of abinet studies have become potentially available to him. At the same time, he